

Evers announces plan to ease restrictions at Waupun, Green Bay prisons

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The Evers administration wants to move nearly a quarter of those held at Waupun to other correctional facilities in the state to relieve staffing issues at the 19th-century prison and allow prisoners to again move more freely.

Gov. Tony Evers also announced a study that will consider whether to decommission the prison, which dates back to the 1850s.

The moves, announced late yesterday, were part of a broader plan to work toward restoring regular movement for prisoners at Waupun and Green Bay.

The plan also came as the administration has faced criticism over conditions at the state's oldest prisons and the lockdowns that have been in place since March 29 at Waupun and June 19 at Green Bay.

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Evers, who ran in 2018 on a platform that included seeking to reduce the state's prison population, also announced he is directing his Corrections Department to review a host of possibilities for Waupun. That could range from renovations to decommissioning the facility. The announcement noted decommissioning the site would require a substantial reduction in the state's prison population, which has rebounded to pre-COVID-19 levels with about 21,800 adults as of last week. Meanwhile, the gov's office said upgrades at the facility would be challenging because some existing structures would likely need to be razed and replaced.

To address the issue, the gov is directing Corrections to "review and consider potential capital planning options to pursue in the absence of a significant reduction

in institution vacancy rates and chronic staffing pressure.”

The moves come amid ongoing staffing issues at some prisons. The release notes Waupun’s vacancy rate for prison guards and sergeants was 54.6% and Green Bay’s was 40.9% in the most recent pay period. To help address the issue at Waupun, 22 staff from other institutions are required to provide support.

Evers and Corrections Secretary Kevin Carr visited Waupun last Thursday, and the gov’s office said they plan to visit more prisons in the coming weeks.

“We will continue to use every lever and option available to bolster staffing resources and address vacancy rates to ensure the safety of staff and people in our care while resuming critical programming,” Evers said.

Two lawmakers often focused on correctional issues, Reps. Michael Schraa, R-Oshkosh, and Mark Born, R-Beaver Dam, told WisPolitics late yesterday they hadn’t yet read through the plan as it came out minutes before the Assembly adjourned its floor session.

The plan includes:

*transferring about 220 inmates now housed at Waupun to other facilities. As of last week, the prison had a population of nearly 1,000, well above its designed capacity of 882, according to the most recent Corrections figures. The administration said institutions across the prison system currently have several hundred beds offline due to staffing issues. But the combination of pay raises in the current budget and an increase in graduates from guard academy classes will allow those beds to come back online.

*transitioning Waupun to single-cell occupancy by March 1.

*reducing, effective yesterday, the number of restrictions on inmate movement at Waupun, though there continue to be restrictions on visitation, personal hygiene frequency and recreation time due to staffing shortages.

*easing restrictions at Green Bay, where only visitation and recreation time remain suspended due to staffing issues.

*updating DOC policies to help ensure staff swiftly respond to inmates in distress, including one that would require staff make security rounds every 30 minutes in

restrictive housing units, typically referred to as solitary confinement.

See more [here](#).